

The report concludes that with ordinary precaution, no serious risk is involved in the use of gaseous hydrogen cyanide for the purposes mentioned. The work must be controlled by experienced operators and high concentrations avoided when possible.

REFERENCE

1. Monier-Williams, G. W. *Reports on Public Health and Medical Subjects. No. 60. The Effect on Foods of Fumigation with Hydrogen Cyanide.* H. M. Stationery Office, 1930.

SIGHT SAVING

THE Sight-Saving Review, Volume 1, No. 1, comes to our desk. Its object must appeal to everyone, whatever his particular line of endeavor may be.

The new Journal is designed specifically "to meet the needs of state and local prevention of blindness workers, educators, illuminating engineers, school physicians and nurses, safety engineers, public health administrators, industrial physicians and nurses, sight-saving class teachers and supervisors, ophthalmologists, and any one interested in the sociologic aspects of saving sight." The Editor, Lewis H. Carris, is assisted by a Board on which are a number of well known persons. The printing and make-up are excellent.

We welcome the new Journal, and wish for it the wide success it deserves.

TOO MUCH HEALTH PROPAGANDA?

ALL wise teachers of preventive medicine have recognized that there should be a happy balance between the inculcation of fear of disease and the love of health. For the average person, except those in the prime of youth, the fear of death seems to be the greatest incentive to the cultivation of health. Many teachers pursue the method of evangelists, who picture the terrors of hell and damnation until their hearers are "converted," and then dwell upon the blessings of love.

This general topic has given rise to considerable discussion through some radical statements recently published.¹ We suffer in this country particularly from fads, the prevailing ones relating chiefly to diet, because of the many statements of "food experts" whose attention is for the moment riveted chiefly on vitamins. No less authority than Hinhede has said that "America is vitamin crazy." Most of these faddists lack education; many need employment; and, without doubt,

some belong to a class not entirely normal mentally—though it must be remembered that “The mind forges strange fetters for itself,” and even so great a man as Bishop Berkeley held that this material world was nothing, and tar water was everything.

The marvelous things which bacteriology has revealed are responsible for the fact, noted particularly in women, that germs have largely taken the place of the evil spirits of old, as Aldous Huxley has pointed out.

The great prominence given to intercollegiate athletics, under the pseudonym, physical education, is also responsible for some of the present evils. We hear such expressions as “utterly fit,” “positive health”; and all sorts of preposterous food habits, exercises, and stunts are indulged in to attain this object. The number of sudden deaths of elderly men on golf links, for example, has been well parodied in the epitaph, “I was well, I wanted to be better, and here I lie.”

The article referred to states that there is an American book prescribing physical exercises for infants of 5 months, and there are parents who put their babies through absurd training. Some cases turn out well, but the relation of cause and effect has not been demonstrated. In this country, for several years past, we have devoted much attention and an enormous amount of printer’s ink to periodic health examinations, and widespread campaigns have been put on by associations devoted to one form or another of health propaganda, urging early diagnosis for tuberculosis, cancer, etc., with excellent results.

The plain facts seem to be that in infancy and childhood we have accomplished a tremendous saving of illness as well as life. In the middle ages, we have postponed death, while for later years we have accomplished but little. Once before in these columns we have combated the idea, formerly taught by many physicians and even some health officers, that it was better to have the contagious diseases while young, on the ground that they were like debutantes—one must take them young or they go hard. We can but maintain the same general attitude. Such examples as the practical elimination of typhoid fever during the World War, the cleaning up of Havana, the Panama Canal Zone, and other focuses of yellow fever, must for all time prove the wisdom of proper precautions for the preservation of health, and it would be criminal not to teach them, even at the expense of evolving some hypochondriacs.

There will always be health faddists, at least until everybody is entirely normal mentally, but this will not come during the time of anyone now living. We cannot but deprecate the plan of dwelling too much upon disease and creating morbid fears which are anything but

beneficial to the general health. Fear is not a good steady diet, in either religion or health. It may "convert" some, but it does not keep them good. It acts in health matters just as it does in religion—people are good only so long as they are frightened. We are very much like the small boy who prayed at night, but said he could take care of himself in the daytime.

In spite of the damage which we believe has been done by faddists, and those who use fear of ill health for money making purposes, we believe that they have done some good in making the general public ask questions and seek knowledge concerning the body, its normal functions, and diseased conditions. It seems certain, as pointed out by one writer, that in tuberculosis, and probably other diseases, fear has lost its hold. Except in cases of phthisiophobia, fear has not been active in this matter for a long time. Consumption, like the poor, is always with us, and even the extensive campaign which has been going on for the last 25 years against this disease has not awakened an untoward sense of fear in the general public.*

Our feeling is that health teaching and measures for the protection of health must go on. Our great effort should be directed toward the elimination of half educated faddists and uneducated educators. The teaching should be done by people sound mentally as well as physically, who have had proper training, who will avoid exaggeration, and both teach and practise the precept of Saint Paul, "He that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things."

* It is interesting to note that many religious publications have called attention to the falling off of evangelism and revivals. Only a few stars can now make more than a bare living at this calling.

REFERENCE

1. Hutchinson, Robert. The Pursuit of Health, *Canad. Medical Association Journal*, Jan., 1931, p. 16.

AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION YEAR BOOK

FOR the first time in the sixty years of the Association's existence a *Year Book* has been issued and is now ready for distribution. Its aim is to provide in a single convenient place all of the committee reports presented at the Fifty-ninth Annual Meeting in Fort Worth, Tex., October 27–30, 1930, and the information concerning the organization, activities and membership of the Association which its members and others may require.

It has been issued in response to insistent demands, reiterated yearly, to publish important committee reports as soon as practicable after their presentation at Annual Meetings. Since 1911, these valu-